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Lombrozo: Bitcoin Core Developers May Never Use Miner-Focused BIP 9 Signaling Again



BY KYLE TORPEY ([HTTPS://BITCOINMAGAZINE.COM/AUTHORS/KYLE-TORPEY](https://bitcoinmagazine.com/authors/kyle-torpey))
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One of the key points of contention in the politicization of Bitcoin protocol development over the past couple of years has been the concept of miner signaling. While not intended to be a vote among miners to decide the future of the Bitcoin network, Ciphrex (<https://ciphrex.com/>) CEO and Bitcoin Core (<https://bitcoincore.org>) contributor Eric Lombrozo (https://twitter.com/eric_lombrozo) pointed out that miners are now using the signaling process as leverage in the discussion over Bitcoin scaling.

Lombrozo made the comments during a discussion with host Thomas Hunt and Bitcoin developer Jimmy Song on Hunt's [Mad Bitcoins YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTcB5bRGQj0) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTcB5bRGQj0>).

“This whole signaling thing is a huge problem that I think created a very terrible narrative,” said Lombrozo.

What Is BIP 9?

BIP 9 (<https://github.com/bitcoin/bips/blob/master/bip-0009.mediawiki>) is a method of rolling out [soft-fork](https://bitcoin.org/en/glossary/soft-fork) (<https://bitcoin.org/en/glossary/soft-fork>) upgrades to Bitcoin. The short description of this process is that soft-forked changes will be enabled once 95 percent of miners have signaled to the network that they are ready for activation, using a trick called “version bits.”

“It was an arbitrary system created by developers in order to coordinate smooth soft-fork transitions,” said Lombrozo. “It was not designed to be a political system for voting on controversial issues ever — that was never the intention.”

Lombrozo also noted that, in the past, soft forks have been deployed on Bitcoin without any special treatment for miners, and BIP 9 was supposed to solve some of the issues miners could face during the deployment of a soft fork.

“It was introduced for the courtesy of miners to be able to reduce their [orphan rates](https://bitcoin.stackexchange.com/questions/5859/what-are-orphaned-and-stale-blocks) (<https://bitcoin.stackexchange.com/questions/5859/what-are-orphaned-and-stale-blocks>) and reduce the probability that they're going to end up mining blocks that are actually invalid — that was the real motivation behind it,” said Lombrozo.

According to Lombrozo, the goal is still to get nodes upgraded and enforce the rules of the soft fork; BIP 9 was simply a technique to coordinate with miners.

The Ciphrex CEO added that there was nothing like miner signaling in the original version of Bitcoin, and Satoshi Nakamoto never used miner signaling for the soft forks that he deployed on the network.

“It was a mechanism that was created way later,” said Lombrozo. “And once this mechanism was created, it was abused and turned against the developers to try to extort stuff. And now it's being used against businesses to extort stuff from them.”

BIP 9 Does Not Work With Uncooperative Miners

According to Lombrozo, BIP 9 would not have been used for [Segregated Witness](https://bitcoinmagazine.com/articles/segregated-witness-part-how-a-clever-hack-could-significantly-increase-bitcoin-s-potential-1450553618) (<https://bitcoinmagazine.com/articles/segregated-witness-part-how-a-clever-hack-could-significantly-increase-bitcoin-s-potential-1450553618>) (SegWit) if the contributors to Bitcoin Core knew then what they know now.

“If we considered that there had been this kind of, like, contentious or adversarial situation, then BIP 9 would not have been used,” said Lombrozo. “We would not have used the signaling mechanism because it obviously does not work under those kinds of circumstances.”

In Lombrozo's view, miners are now using the effective veto power that comes with the miner signaling process outlined in BIP 9 as leverage in the discussions around scaling Bitcoin. He also believes Bitcoin Core developers may deserve some of the blame for using BIP 9 in the first place.

"But at the same time, we only had the best of intentions at the moment," added Lombrozo. "We thought we'd gotten through all these disagreements and it seemed like the miners were for it and going to support it ... Obviously, the adversarial case needs to be considered because it's just the nature of this network and the way that it works."

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Lombrozo suggested that miners also used miner signaling as a sort of "propaganda" tool with Bitcoin Unlimited, even though there was no activation mechanism included in the code.

Never Use BIP 9 Again?

According to Lombrozo, miners now think they have some control over the protocol due to the use of the miner signaling process outlined in BIP 9.

"Miners started thinking, 'Hey, maybe we have control over the protocol because of this whole signaling thing,'" said Lombrozo during his discussion with Hunt and Song.

Lombrozo claimed that "we're never going to use BIP 9 to deploy anything almost for sure" if SegWit is not activated via the current BIP 9 deployment.

As an alternative, Bitcoin Core could turn to [BIP 8 \(https://github.com/bitcoin/bips/blob/master/bip-0008.mediawiki\)](https://github.com/bitcoin/bips/blob/master/bip-0008.mediawiki), which is a variation of BIP 9 from pseudonymous developer Shaolin Fry that eventually activates a soft-forking change whether miners have signaled for it or not. Miners can still activate the change before it is automatically locked-in on the network, but approval from miners is not required before that lock-in takes place.

Watch the full episode here:

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